



RELATIONAL CONFLICT ANALYSIS PAPER

Communication in Personal Relationships

Identify an important relationship in your life, reflect on a conflict within said relationship. This paper should cover the history of the relationship, a clear explanation of the conflict, an in-depth and insightful deconstruction of that conflict. Include four different terms, concepts, or themes from the textbook and class lectures. Must include these sections: history, uniqueness / relational specificity, conflict / power dynamics, and conclusion/resolution.

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The most important aspects of any relationship are the presence of mutual respect and genuine love for one another and the relation itself. The relationship itself and the circumstances surrounding it matter just as well, but all that falls short if both sides don't hold up their end. Some of the most overlooked relationships, those within families, can be the most telling of an individual; a relationship bought to be by blood, and sometimes blood is all there is. So much of who we are as individuals can be tied to who we are as sons and daughters, whether we like it or not, our upbringing and those who contributed to it have an immense amount of influence on the self. The relationships themselves that are formed within our family lay some of the groundwork out for us, as the endless stream of people we choose to surround ourselves with as we journey through our life.

Being the youngest from the family of six, and then on to be one of thirty or so cousins, the relationships I have with my family members are the most important ones I have. Not only does my large family make it easy to have built in friends, but the closeness in proximity between all of us is the real deal breaker. My grandma, my mom and three of her five siblings all live in my hometown, leaving eleven Styler/Scheibler/O'Conner grandchildren of all ages throughout one school district. As well as one of my dad's sister, with four daughters all around my age and living right around the corner, I am forever thankful for how easy it was to grow up with all of them nearby.

My one aunt in particular, Kathleen, my mom's older sister, who lives just a two-minute drive down the road, has been one of the most influential figures in my life. A driven, loving, and incredibly smart woman, a role model to not only my mom and her siblings but to a lot of our family as well, is mother to my four cousins: Bridget (32), Maureen (Mo) (30), Colleen (27), and John Patrick (22). Not only do I have my mom and Kath's relationship to thank for the closeness of her and I, but all of us kids too, my brothers, Michael and Sam, same ages as Mo and Colleen, meant for endless combined life events and celebrations. You can imagine the amount of carpooling my mom and aunt did, and the endless trips and games JP and I tagged along to. Even though he was in-between Hannah (24) and I (20), him and I were inseparable and seemed to always be up to no good.

John Patrick, only two years older than me, and just under a three-minute drive from mine, never was able to attend the same school as I until our High School years briefly overlapped. Our relationship is one of the easiest things in my life, never needing to explain myself to him, or worry of disconnect as time goes on, it is a stability I am sure I will have for the rest of time.

Growing up with John Patrick without a doubt was one of the most influential parts of my childhood, not only thinking of all the activities and mischief we got up to, but the challenges that arose and the learning experiences I gained from his and my relationship. Only being a short drive away from one another our entire lives, I was there for so many of his moments: when he first learned to swim and ride his bike on his own, every new Lego set, and all the babysitters, basketball games and trips to the mall to see either Santa or the Easter Bunny. We were inseparable and it worked out perfectly for my mom and aunt, the two best of friends with plenty of memories and nothing but time.

UNIQUENESS

John Patrick and mine's relationship is one that will be with me throughout my life, blessing me with the security of a lifetime of love to share with him, and the gift of already countless memories and moments of growth and understanding. Growing up I always knew that John and I were in some way different, not by means of appearance or wellbeing but I could tell from the way my parents and others around us dealt and mannered him. Whether it be from his outbursts or his odd likings and habits, he was never given that stern talk but never really coddled at that either.

John Patrick is diagnosed with, what, according to the CDC, one out of every fifty-four children in the US have, an autism spectrum disorder.

I cannot remember when I was first told that exactly or even if I was ever told that, rather one day I noticed the reality that that is, for JP, my aunt and uncle, cousins, and those who are present in John's life... Looking back, I realized I never noticed anything different from him and

I because there wasn't, we had this untouched, genuine, and youthful admiration for one another, that I'm not sure it would've changed anything from knowing.

One part of it all that was hard for me and my aunt especially, was that John and I never attended school together until high school. Not being able to find the right fit/right programs and aids in the school districts in our and the nearby towns, John had to attend school thirty minutes south at Metro Prep. And as the years went on, and his schools kept switching and his schedule seemed to always get busier, we still always found time for one another.

Tagging along for so many of his events or appointments, there is not a lot that we haven't experienced together or alongside one another. There was a brief period where John would attend horseback riding lessons as means of therapy, some of the afternoons were spent at Liberty Farm with my uncle John and him. Through horseback riding, John was able to conquer the many fearful challenges that sensorily enabled him as a child. Being able to be care for and clean a large but tame and gentle animal, all on his own gifted John with an immense amount of courage and joy.

His time on the saddle didn't last long, during one of his sessions while he was riding out, a storm in the distance let out a crack of thunder and spooking the horse. And in an instance, John's sense of everything was off, thrown from the horse and onto his side, 12-year-old JP broke his first bone in quiet possibly the most traumatic way.

No one could have prepared John for what that feels like, not only to have a broken bone but to be spooked right out of your comfort zone and into a moment of pure panic. And I was able to be there, side by side on the couch, holding his other hand as he wept in pain and frustration, and completely oblivious to the importance of this moment. Looking back, it seems to be the only memory of John truly needing me, even if it was only a hand, it was a gesture and a needed one at that.

John was never one to show affection through his words or touch growing up, always giving a one liner or the never-ending "Why?", and always tickling or flicking myself and all our cousins. Growing up, he never liked to be touch as a kid, never liked hugs or holding hands to

cross the roads, and he used to always try and give us wet-willeys (sticking your finger in your mouth and then putting it in someone's ear without them knowing).

And he never knew when to say when.

Our uncle Kevin, the 'fun and single' one, used to always join in on our fun, took the two of us out on endless adventures, and loved to mess with John. They had this little game going on for a couple years, John would "secretly" mess with him all while Kevin was fully aware of where this was going, and they'd go back and forth until Kev 'out of nowhere' catches John's finger millimeters from his ear. Uncle Kevin spent a lot of time with the two of us, never really parenting or babying, but really being there in the moment and making sure we are doing the same.

When John and I were in middle school, myself battling the awkwardness of boys and friends all while maintaining an embarrassing science fiction obsession, and John being even more obsessed with batman and all things Gotham, my uncle saw it as the perfect time to bring us to Comic Con. The first convention either of us attended, we were both overwhelmed even before entrance, but more so John who could barely hold in his excitement any longer. And right away, an immediate sensory overload. From the loud noise of it all, to the number of other attendees, to all those decked out in cosplay, and to his moment of realization, that all his favorite superhero's (he didn't care they weren't the actors) were here. All those happenings were stressors for him, confusing him and intensifying as he tries to take in his environment and in that moment, he took my hand as an anchor for the second time.

When thinking of moments like these, I never would have thought to dissect and try and pinpoint the different stressors / factors that contributed to it but looking back its obvious.

Our sensory input and the degree to which our attentions are managed or tampered with is determined by our salience, how well our attention may be held. And it's not just one has high salience, there are three factors that determine one's salience, and in John's case, these are always changing and always important. The first being, intensity, the range in opposites from low extremes to highs and sometimes the inability to keep up to pace, and one's sensory excitement or abrasiveness. Which can be easily affected by the next, environment, whether it's

a consistent or its always changing, the uncertainty of it all adds huge input. And finally, one's mental/emotional influence, all our concerns or desires become more noticeable once you're already on edge. And it's clear in that moment, that all of these were going off red flags were going up inside his head and his inability to focus on only one of these factors left him with no reaction but to hold on.

Knowing this has since allowed me to sit back and reflect on a lot of the times when I thought John was overreacting or times when he looked so standoffish and timid, when it was really him trying to make sense of it all. And a huge part of what made it all so hard for those rather public times, was that there was this "shared reality" of the environment already, this unconscious happening/understanding that John was unaware of.

This played out a lot by the time we finally found ourselves in the same halls and specifically, the same lunch table my Sophomore and his Senior year of High School. Some of my favorite memories of not only John and I but my High School experiences, were spent at that table. Sixth period lunch was the one and only time John and I shared a class time together, even though it wasn't a real class, I walked away with learning experiences and lessons than any throughout my first year. That table sat myself, John, my two friends Connor, Sammy, and Jack, and two of Johns classmates, Danny, and Hope. And it went on like that, every day, all of us sharing snacks and stories but mostly the space, we had a place we all looked forward to. Our lunch being near the end of the day meant for plenty of time to debrief the day and try and rid the stress to last the day, sometimes it worked.

I found that I wasn't sitting here for myself but rather because of the significance that they have in my life and I in there's. Having these be some of the most important interpersonal communication I have partaken in, from the dynamic of the group to that of conversation, mine and their words mattered and had an impact. Not only was the uniqueness of our coming together enough, but the short amount of time for us to be comfortable and encouraging of one another was something else. Sitting at that table alongside John, completely aware and comfortable with the fast pace nature that is High School, did I realize he no longer needs my hand.

Being able to grow up with someone, and to not only see their life pass by but to actively be a part of it and to know that you both have changed for the better because of it, must be one of the most special parts of it all. We've experienced a few heartbreaks and losses together, injuries and trophies, conventions, and graduations, and got to walk down the aisle at his sister Mo's together. There isn't anything or anyone quite like John and his relationships he has, I can tell from only a few words and a glance that he still treats and sees me the same as he did back then.

John was able to introduce me to so many new people and friendships, having me tag along to his playdates with family friends and classmates, and calling me over for every ghost in the graveyard with his neighbors. Our relationship is one of the most influential relationships I have looking back both on my childhood and onto the future.

CONFLICT

With how easy of a relationship John and I had, in terms of disagreeing or arguing, we rarely ever did either, it's hard not to see the problem at hand. When we were younger, John Patrick would experience these fits of rage, coming out of seemingly nowhere and not ending anytime soon. With origins either regarding who gets to play who in a game, if a toy was in someone else's possession for too long, or just a long day, the screaming would follow soon after.

So many of these outbursts happened when we were younger, and a lot can be attributed to the neighborhood block and the kids that filled it. The catalyst for nearly all these fits, his neighbor across the street, Jack, would push and push until there was nothing left.

I never asked Jack if he knew that John had autism or if he even knew what it was, regardless of the point, he managed to somehow use it against John whenever he could. Leaving John sometimes begging for Jack's forgiveness for more play time after Jack was the one to start the disagreement in the first place. Most the time, the conflict would arise after Jack already had his go at irritating John as much as he could before fighting and avoiding of resolution ensued. There was this unspoken understanding that John was always the one left apologizing, even if Jack was the one to make the first move, he'd back on his defensiveness to get him out of this

situation, every time. Looking back, I hope Jack realized all he had done and how easily avoidable it all was, but I realized that he might've had an internal conflict too confronting to face, Johns was easier because it was a reality.

These outbursts would start surface level, just him shutting down any idea or comment from us, to gradually grow and grow into this presence, unable for him to grasp or slow down, and it would run its course. His anger would be so great sometimes, he'd find himself forgetting to breathe, making him red inside and out, and winded for air and peace.

I always wanted to know what the reasons behind some of these behaviors were, wanting him to come out and say what really is bothering him, but I know that even sometimes still, he doesn't exactly know. It wasn't always a conflict with the intent to have a resolution or a compromise but rather for the event to happen and to move on from it.

CONCLUSION

If I am sure on anything, it is that John Patrick will forever be a part of my life, not just because we are family but because of the power and worth of our relationship. As the years have gone on, and we no longer are side by side, the pickup when we first come back is never uncomfortable but more natural than anything.

Still only living a few minutes' drive away, I don't find myself driving over there nearly as much as I should, but I will always know I have him to go to. There is not one thing John could do or say that make me think it is better to not have him in my life, it simply isn't part of his being, nor would it do me any good.

Having the memories and experiences that I do with John, and especially those of times of anger or frustration, I've realized to take things slow and to take all things in to account. Thinking back on all the times that people stood and witnessed Johns fits but said nothing or acknowledged and understood, I am learning to do the same.

To walk away from a relationship, without really walking away, has made me understand just how special that specific one is. From the different ways you pick up on one another's cues, or the activities and shared interests you have, to how you understand the importance of this connection and your part in it as well in their lives.

All of these make me so thankful to have such a strong, constant relationship with someone that I've been able to grow with from the beginning.

CITATIONS

“Autism Statistics and Facts.” *Autism Speaks*, [www.autismspeaks.org/autism-statistics-asd#:~:text=Autism%20Prevalence,\)%2C%20according%20to%202016%20data.&text=Boys%20are%20four%20times%20more,diagnosed%20with%20autism%20than%20girls](http://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-statistics-asd#:~:text=Autism%20Prevalence,)%2C%20according%20to%202016%20data.&text=Boys%20are%20four%20times%20more,diagnosed%20with%20autism%20than%20girls) .

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